

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 4, 2022

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent 168 towns and cities.

- **HB 5283 An Act Concerning The Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula And The Funding Of Other Education Programs.**
- **SB 232 An Act Concerning The Excess Cost Grant For Special Education**

Good morning/afternoon Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Erika Wiecenski, I am the First Selectman for Willington and I am here today to present testimony in support of two bills: HB 5283 and SB 232.

HB 5283 would, among other things, address education financial equity by accelerating the phase-in funding of the education cost sharing (ECS) grant for towns that are underfunded through 2024, rather than 2027. The bill would also maintain the commitment of phasing out those district that will see funding declines so that they can be absorbed during a reasonable period of time. In addition, the proposal would fully fund other educational efforts.

The current mechanisms to provide education funding is inadequate and inequitable to meet the needs of Connecticut's student population. The cost for public education in our state is over \$12.3 billion and municipal property taxpayers fund 53.3% of that amount (\$6.6 billion), with the State and federal governments providing the balance. A particular drawback of the current system is that it fails to account for a student-based approach to improve the outcomes for all students.

All of our students deserve to be funded based on what they need to be successful. English Learners, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students navigating through their education in communities that experience concentrated poverty, all deserve to be funded at a level that makes a real and tangible difference.

SB 232 would create a tiered system for reimbursement for special education based on a municipality's wealth.

Special education costs, statewide, exceed \$1.8 million – and continue to rise. Towns and cities pay for about 60% of those costs. Unforeseen demands for special education services too often result in local budget adjustments, supplementary appropriations, and other extraordinary measures. This is particularly troublesome in smaller towns, where the addition of even one special-needs student can decimate a budget.

Specially, the bill would eliminate the Excess Cost grant threshold of 4.5 times the district's average per-pupil expenditure to a tiered rate, either 2.25, 3, or 3.75 times the district's average per-pupil expenditure, depending on the per capita net equalized grand list of the town. CCM has long advocated for a decrease to the Excess Cost grant threshold to 2.5 times the district's average per-pupil expenditure statewide and fully fund the grant. While SB 232 does not lower the threshold for all towns and cities, it does provide an equitable step towards improving special education funding.

CCM encourages the Committee for favorably support both HB 5283 and SB 232.